

Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”

Dogma 1: *The analytic/synthetic distinction.* “truths which are...grounded in meanings independent of matters of fact, and truths which are...grounded in fact” (p. 20)

Dogma 2: *Reductionism.* “Each meaningful statement is equivalent to some logical construct upon terms which refer to immediate experience” (ibid.)

Against Dogma 1: There seems to be no way to define this distinction.

Attempt 1: analytic statements are such that their denials are self-contradictory. Quine: “the notion of self-contradictoriness, in quite the broad sense needed for the definition of analyticity, stands in exactly the same need of clarification as the notion of analyticity itself” (ibid.)

Attempt 2: [Kant] analytic statements attribute to the subject “no more than is already conceptually contained in the subject” (ibid.) Quine: Limited to statements of subject-predicate form, and “containment” is metaphorical.

Attempt 3: “a statement is analytic when it is true by virtue of meanings and independently of fact.”

Ok, but what is meaning? [Not merely naming; see ‘Scott’ vs. ‘The author of *Waverly*’]
Quine: “the primary business of the theory of meaning [is] simply the *synonymy* of linguistic forms” (p. 22)

Refinement of Attempt 3: Analytic statements are either logical truths or can be turned into a logical truth by putting synonyms for synonyms. [See (1) vs. (2)] But what is synonymy? (More later)

Attempt 4: [Carnap] analytic statements are true on any truth-value assignment. Quine: “this ...serves its purpose only if the atomic statements of the language are...mutually independent....The criterion in terms of state-descriptions is a reconstruction at best of logical truth, not of analyticity” (p. 23-4).

Back to the Refined 3rd attempt: What is synonymy?

CAVEAT: “we are not concerned here with synonymy in the sense of complete identity in psychological associations...no two expressions are synonymous in such a sense. We are concerned only with what may be called *cognitive* synonymy” (p. 28)

Attempt 3.1 Synonyms are synonyms by definition (p. 24) Quine: “Are we to appeal to the nearest dictionary, and accept the lexicographer’s formulation as law? Clearly this would be to put the cart before the horse” (ibid.)

Attempt 3.2 Synonyms are synonyms in virtue of an explication (in Carnap’s sense). Quine “what is required is not that the definiendum...be synonymous with the definiens, but just that each of these favored contexts of the definiendum...be synonymous with the corresponding context of the definiens” (p. 25).

Attempt 3.3 Synonyms are synonyms in virtue of conventional introduction Quine: This is true with some synonyms, but not all.

Digression on definition in math and logic. [May be relevant later]

Attempt 3.4 Synonyms are words that can be interchanged in all contexts *salve veritate*. Quine: There are exceptions, e.g., quotational contexts and idiomatic expressions. But perhaps we can take quote-names and idioms each as a single “word,” where the notion of a “word” is left primitive.

Still, in an *extensional* language, substitutivity *salve veritate* is not enough for analyticity. Consider ‘creature with a heart’ and ‘creature with a kidney’.

Thus, you need the adverb ‘Necessarily’ in the language, “this adverb being so construed as to yield truth when and only when applied to an analytic statement” (p. 29-30). But: “To suppose that [the adverb makes sense] is to suppose that we have already made satisfactory sense of ‘analytic’” (p. 30).

Attempt 5 (Back to analyticity)

Preliminary: “I do not know whether the statement ‘Everything green is extended’ is analytic. Now does my indecision...really betray an incomplete understanding, an incomplete grasp of the “meanings,” of ‘green’ and ‘extended’? I think not. The trouble is...with ‘analytic’” (p. 32)

The Proposal: [Carnap] In a regimented language L_0 , a statement is analytic in virtue of explicit “semantical rules.”

Quine: “The rules tell us that such and such statements, and only those, are the analytic statements of L_0 . Now here the difficulty is simply that the rules contain the word ‘analytic’, which we do not understand!”(p. 33)

Reply: Introduce ‘analytic’ by conventional definition. Quine: The result does not illuminate the notion of analyticity, since ‘analytic’ here would really mean “analytic-in- L_0 ”. But even if we restrict analyticity to regimented languages, it should extend to regimented languages besides L_0 .

Reply 2: Introduce semantic rules which specify certain sentences as *true*. Then say that those statements specified as true are the analytic statements. Quine: This requires a specialized notion of ‘semantical rule,’ since not every statement which says that a certain class of sentences is true can define what is analytic. Otherwise, every sentence will be analytic. [We could specify a class of sentences as “the semantic rules,” but this uses the word ‘semantic rule’ which is what we do not understand.] Moreover, “given simply a notation, mathematical or otherwise...who can say which of its true statements rank as postulates? Obviously the question is meaningless—as meaningless as asking which points in Ohio are starting points” (p. 35)]

Follow-up Reply: The semantic rules are those rules which *translate* expressions of L_0 into natural language. Quine: “Semantical rules determining the analytic statements of an artificial language are of interest only in so far as we already understand the notion of analyticity; they are of no help in gaining this understanding” (p. 36)

Attempt 6: (Verificationists) “An analytic statement is that limiting case which is confirmed no matter what” (p. 37). Similarly, “statements are synonymous if and only if they are alike in point of method of empirical confirmation or information” (ibid.)

Quine: This assumes Reductionism, the Second Dogma.

Against Dogma 2: Quine-Duhem confirmation holism.

Reductionism received its most thorough articulation in Carnap’s *Aufbau*, though as Carnap himself later appreciated, the reductive program was incomplete. (E.g., Carnap’s locates qualities at certain space-time points, but the relation of “at” is not reduced into sense-datum language.)

Still: “The dogma of reductionism survives in the supposition that each statement, taken in isolation from its fellows, can admit of confirmation or information at all. My countersuggestion...is that our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but only as a corporate body” (p. 41)

Thus, there is no sense to the idea that a single statement may be confirmed no matter what, which might have defined an analytic statement.

Empiricism without the Dogmas: The “web of belief”

“total science is like a field of force whose boundary conditions are experience. A conflict with experience at the periphery occasions readjustments in the interior of the field” (p. 42)

“Any statement can be held true come what may, if we make drastic enough adjustments elsewhere in the system...Conversely, by the same token, no statement is immune to revision. Revision even of the logical law of the excluded middle has been proposed as a means of simplifying quantum mechanics; and what difference is there in principle between such a shift and the shift whereby Kepler superseded Ptolomy” (p. 43)

Statements “close to the periphery” is a metaphor for “the relative likelihood, in practice, of choosing one statement rather than another for revision in the event of recalcitrant experience” (ibid.)

“Physical objects are...posits comparable, epistemologically, to the gods of Homer. For my part I do, qua lay physicist, believe in physical objects and not in Homer’s gods...But in point of epistemological footing the physical objects and the gods differ only in degree and not in kind...The myth of physical objects is epistemologically superior to most in that it has proved more efficacious” (p. 44)

Grice & Strawson, “In Defense of a Dogma”

Three ways to reject a distinction:

- (1) The distinction is vague or ambiguous. G&S: This would be a “prelude to clarification” (p. 141)
- (2) The distinction isn’t useful. G&S: This acknowledges the distinction, but suggests we don’t need it.
- (3) Quine’s way: The distinction is inadequately explained.

G&S: But from (3), it does not follow that the distinction is illusory. It only suggests that there isn’t a proper philosophical elucidation of the distinction (which is quite common).

Plus, philosophers “apply the term ‘analytic’ to more or less the same cases, withhold it from more or less the same cases, and hesitate over more or less the same cases. This agreement extends...to new cases.” (p. 143).

G&S think this shows there is a distinction. So Quine must mean that we misunderstand the nature of the distinction, not that there is none to be made.

So Quine’s view must be that we make the distinction by appeal to some illusory property, though there is a distinction, between things that *appear* to have the property, and those that don’t. [Of course, philosophers don’t take themselves to be making *that* distinction, but still they could be mistaken about what is being distinguished.]

Unacceptable consequences

x and y are synonyms just in case x “means the same as” y . But since Quine rejects synonym/non-synonym distinction, he must reject the distinction between “means the same” and “does not mean the same” [though Quine can have the distinction between co-extensional and non-coextensional terms]. But the distinction about meaning is not “the special property of philosophers” so there’s no way to counter the presumption that there is a distinction to be made here.

Moreover, it would be senseless on Quine’s view to say that two terms are co-extensional but have different meanings. Yet he does say that with ‘creature with a heart’ vs. ‘creature with a kidney’. Quine would also reject apparently the notion of *translation*. And he’d seem to reject the notion of *expressions having a meaning*—because if he did not, then it would make sense to talk of expressions having the same meaning. So we’d have to get rid of the notion of “sense” itself.

Quine’s standards of adequate explication:

For Quine, “There is a certain circle or family of expressions, of which ‘analytic’ is one” And “making satisfactory sense” of one of these expressions would involve:

- (1) providing an explanation which “does not incorporate any expression belonging to the family-circle.” (p. 147)
- (2) providing an explanation which identified “some feature common and peculiar to all cases to which, for example, the word ‘analytic’ is to be applied” (ibid.)

G&S: “It is perhaps dubious whether *any* such explanations can *ever* be given” (p. 148)

“The only plausible reason for being harder on these expressions is...the point that ‘analytic’ and ‘synthetic’ themselves are technical philosophical expressions. To the rejoinder that other expressions of the family...are common property, the reply would be doubtless that these expressions have to be used in specially adjusted and precise senses (or pseudo-senses)” (p. 149)

G&S: “though the point has force, it does not have whatever force would be required to justify us in insisting that the expressions concerned should pass exactly that test for significance” (ibid.) Besides, there are less formal explanations of these notions, e.g., the case of ‘my three-year-old child is an adult’ when the speaker insists on its literal reading.

Two further criticisms:

Quine’s concession that conventional introduction makes two expressions synonymous makes his position incoherent. For to acknowledge that some expressions are synonymous is to acknowledge the synonymy/non-synonymy distinction. It would be then fair to ask “why he thinks it is unintelligible to suggest that the same...relation should exist in the absence of [conventional introduction]” (p. 153).

Quine’s indecision about whether ‘Everything green is extended’ is analytic remains when we replace ‘analytic’ with ‘true’. “the hesitation arises from the fact that the boundaries of application of words are not determined by usage in all possible directions” (ibid.)

Quine’s positive view:

- (1) No statement is immune to revision.
- (2) No individual statement in isolation can be confirmed.

G&S: Both (1) and (2) do not preclude the analytic/synthetic distinction.

RE: (2), Quine grants it would only preclude a verificationist rendering of the A/S distinction, but G&S disagree by suggesting the verificationist could say “two statements are synonymous if and only if any experiences which, *on certain assumptions about the truth-values of other statements*, confirm or disconfirm one of the pair, also, *on the same assumptions*, confirm or disconfirm the other to the same degree” (p. 156)

RE: (1), it still allows an A/S distinction *if* you distinguish between the truth-value of a statement and its meaning. “Any form of words at one time held to express something true may, no doubt, at another time, come to be held to express something false. [And] it is not only philosophers who would distinguish between the case where this happens as the result of a change of opinion on matters of fact, and the case where this happens at least partly as a result of a shift in the sense of words” (p. 157)